



## INABILITY OF USING COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES AMONG SUDANESE EFL LEARNERS

Mustafa Ahmed Al-Gak<sup>1</sup> and Alsadig Osman Mohammed<sup>2</sup>

Sudan University of Science and Technology Graduate College Communication Strategies  
And Sudanese EFL Undergraduates

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### ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a PhD Program which was carried out at Sudan University of Science and Technology. It is felt that Sudanese EFL undergraduate Students drastically lack awareness of communication strategies as essential tools for problem solving. The teaching of the strategies was not rigorously introduced before this program was conducted. This study investigated the relationship between communication strategies use and foreign language (L2) oral production. Hundred participants were assigned to a control and experiment group. Their oral fluency was assessed by means of an oral test in which they were asked to talk about a personal experience. Speech production was elicited in three different sessions. Data analysis revealed that the relationship between communication strategies use and L2 oral fluency, as measured by speech rate, is not statistically significant in any of the two groups' proficiency levels.

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### INTRODUCTION

Communicative strategies play an important role in second language learning, particularly for those who are not native speakers of the target language. The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which lexical communication strategies can be used by Sudanese undergraduates while interacting orally with one another.

Sudanese undergraduates are often confronted with language problems resulting from an inadequate command of the strategies which can be used by them to interact orally (fluently) using appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures. In general communication strategies are seen as tactics used by non-fluent L2 learners to overcome specific communication problems.

#### Communication strategies

Several definitions of communication strategies (CS) have been given by some writers. The concept was first introduced by Selinker (1972). One of the definitions most often referred to is by Tarone (1980) who considers CS to be an interactional phenomenon.

Faerch and Kasper (1983:112) have adopted a psycholinguistic approach that recognizes CS as a part of the planning process. Communication strategies are used when the learner has problems with the original plan and cannot execute it. They recognize CS as a specialized problem-solving activity employed by an individual when faced with insufficient knowledge of the target language. Kasper and Keller man (1997:56) also share the same view with regard to CS. To them, CS are conceived of as mental plans by L2 learners in response

to an internal signal of an imminent problem and hence they are regarded as a specialized problem-solving activity. Therefore, when L2 learners face problems in communication, they will resort to CS.

However, according to Bialystok (1990 PP 16-17), communication strategies may be used equally well in situations where no problems have arisen, as is the case when a native speaker gives a road description to a stranger using a long definition instead of the actual word.

Recent work on the subject of CS differs markedly from the research done in the past decade. Research in the past was firmly rooted in the tradition of error analysis (Selinker, 1972 and Varadi, 1973). Gradually, however, that structural, descriptive approach gave way to an increasingly more interactional one, shifting the focus to discourse analysis (Tarone, 1980; Faerch and Kasper, 1983; Bialystok, 1990). More recent work has adopted a more comprehensive analysis of discourse analysis which requires research methodology and procedures through which interactional data can be adequately elicited, collected, recorded and examined.

Faerch and Kasper (1983 pp 22-34) see communication strategies as a self-help module within the learner, located within a model of speech production. The module has two phases: a planning phase where the plan is developed and an execution phase where the plan is executed. If there are problems with the plan it cannot be executed. The learner in this case either avoids the problem which leads to a change of the communicative goal and this "reduction strategies", or faces the problem and develops an alternative plan which leads to "achievement strategies".

\*✉ **Corresponding author: Mustafa Ahmed Al-Gak**  
Sudan University of Science and Technology Graduate  
College Communication Strategies

### Statement of the problem

It goes without saying that the basic function of language is communication. Actually language means communication. Communication strategies are useful in enabling students to learn a second language. Although oral skills are very important in ELL, listening and speaking courses seem to receive very little attention at the university level. Many students at university level say that they can read and understand what they read but they seem to face great difficulties in communicating orally.

Oral skills are not given much attention by university language teachers who teach large numbers of student in big classes. They concentrate while interacting with their student on reading and writing and put very little emphasis on oral communication. The problem of teacher – student ratio, manifested in the big classes held by English language teachers and resulting in lower scores of language acquisition, is another question which this study tries to answer.

### Questions of the study

1. To what extent do Sudanese University Students find difficulties in communicating orally?
2. To what extent are the Sudanese university tutors aware of the communicative language teaching techniques that could help their students to interact orally?
3. What are the communication strategies that could be used by Sudanese undergraduates to improve their ability in oral communication?

### Significance of the study

Much of the relevant research, over the past two or three decades on the strategies of L2 learning, has been done the effects of selecting the right type of the communication strategies to overcome oral communicative difficulties. All these studies paid special attention to the question of communication as one of the crucial skills that challenge different learners to varying degrees. The main reason why communication has attracted such attention across linguistic studies is mainly attributable to the fact that it practically spreads over all human activities. To make communication possible, learners must find the strategic linguistic or sociolinguistic competence in language. The efforts of arriving at the right communication strategy will eliminate the gap of communication as Bialystok (1990) puts it, the familiar ease and fluency with which we sail from one idea to the next in our first language is constantly shattered by some gap in our knowledge of a second language. Although it is hard, both native and non-native speakers manage to take resort to certain expressions or grammatical structures to make themselves understood (Faucette, 2001).

Therefore, the present research derives its significance from the fact of exploring the areas of difficulties encountered by undergraduate students upon deciding to communicate orally. Students need to be made aware of the use of communication strategies depending on their level of proficiency. Opting for the right type of strategy to overcome oral hurdles has been of central importance which this study seeks to investigate. The main argument of the present research is to pave the path for a

better understanding of the communicative abilities of undergraduate students to help them maximize the use of the different strategies they will have at their disposal. Making special reference to the communicative language courses to be used at the preparatory levels to strengthen oral skills as well as giving enough time to teaching spoken language is another salient point.

Much research has been done on the various problems learners of English are bound to encounter, but there has been very little attention paid to the ways of solving these problems or tackling the importance of the development of EFL learners' strategic competence to solve their communication problems. The significance of the issue can be seen in the great number of erroneous utterances that Sudanese learners of English produce in oral performance and their recourse to CSs. So making the learners aware of their weaknesses in relation to the use of the right communication strategies through teaching and training is an important step towards solving the problem of oral communication in EFL.

### Communication Strategies Used for the Present Study

This Study will be largely drawing on Tarone's insights as far as communication strategies are concerned. Tarone's (1980) defines a communication strategy as "a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning is not shared." Tarone (1981) characterizes strategy use according to the following conditions:

1. The speaker desires to communicate meaning x to a listener.
2. The speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to communicate x is unavailable, or is not shared with the listener.
3. The speaker chooses to do one of the following: a. avoid - that is, not attempt to communicate meaning x; or b. attempt alternate means to communicate meaning x. The speaker stops trying alternatives when it seems clear to the speaker that there is shared meaning.

**Table 1** Types of strategies used in the study

	Intra-individual CSs	Notes
C1	Topic avoidance (TA): avoid discussions about the concept	Avoidance
C2	Message abandonment (MA): stop in mid-utterance	Avoidance
C3	Meaning replacement (MR): use alternative expressions (Paraphrasing)	Avoidance

### Inter-individual Notes

- C4 Clarification request (CR): ask for clarification (Appeal for assistance)  
C5 Repetition (Rep): repeat an utterance

### Research Design

The proper study has three key parts which are *the pre-training, during the training and the post-training* (conducted in that order). The first phase (The pre-training) had a twofold aim: first it was used to run the pre-self-confidence questionnaire and the pre-tests to collect the data that would be compared to the post-test; and, second, it was the step of

the experiment in which the researcher introduced vital information and practice to raise the subjects' self-confidence and willingness to participate in the investigation. In order to be able to assess the outcome of the training on the use of communication strategies by the subjects of the experimental groups, the instruments used in both parts were similar in form and requirements. These instruments consisted of:

- A self-confidence questionnaire task.
- Storytelling task (oral and written).
- Interview task (oral).
- Writing composition task.

As far as the strategy training is concerned, two different types of instruments were used and it was divided into two phases:

The training phase: authentic listening and reading related to the target strategy, as well as the practice phase of each strategy in both mediums (communicative oral and written tasks to practice the taught strategy).

### **Tools of Data Collection**

The tools used for collecting data linked with the students' use of the different communicative strategies:

- Two tests (pre and post): for vocabulary knowledge and Speaking test
- Focus group
- Teachers' questionnaire
- Cartoon Strip
- Telling a Story

### **Pre test**

In this test the researcher will design (6) question in vocabulary with a variety tasks to examine Sudanese EFL students' words knowledge definition meaning, Word formation, Gap Filling, Matching Set of words, translation describing picture and structures. Question one aims at examine students' ability of defining words. As question two is testing students' ability in deriving words by using suffixes. Question three intends to check the students' ability to recognize words by matching words to their synonyms/antonyms. The purpose of question four is to test students' ability in identifying the word thier function. The purpose of question five s to examine students' ability in translation words in their first language. Question six aims at testing students' ability in using appropriate words for describing picture.

### **Post Test**

In post test there are some techniques which aimed at testing production of words, and the active use of Sudanese EFL students' vocabulary knowledge. Such as definition, word formation, translation competition and providing pictures .Question one aims to check students 'knowledge in recognize students ability by identifying the word meaning. Question two aims at checking the students' ability in deriving words by using knowledge of the word. Question three for testing students', pronunciation. Question four examines students' ability to supply equivalent of words in either their first language or EFL by translation words. Question five is for testing students' ability

to retrieve learnt vocabulary while communicating in the language by using their own words. Question six aims to test student ability to use their own words interpretation picture.

### **Speaking tests**

Speaking tests are testing students on communicative skills, observing social conventions, conveying facts, discussion, seeking and giving information, expressing disagreement, making suggestions and recommendations and others.

There are two sections for the speaking component test:

#### **An individual presentation (Task A)**

This task is taking (11 to 14) minutes There are three parts to this task and each part fulfils a specific function in terms of interaction pattern, task input and students output the researcher chooses three types of oral test first , Introduction and interview begins with student introducing himself or herself and checking the students identification. .second test is mini presentation it gives instructions, description and explanation for students list of two topics and assessor ask students talk about them, third test is role –play direct, face-to-face exchange between two students. It follows a pre-determined structure but still allow both people a degree of freedom to say what they think. We should not interrupt the student while speaking when he or she makes mistakes. If we do it can discourage him or her from speaking.

#### **Group discussion (Task B)**

It tests the ability of the students to interact and take turns, to negotiate meaning, to manage discussion and to close the discussion. Most of our learners, through observation, are able to communicate their ideas and thoughts fairly well in the individual task (Task A). The speaking tests prepared as the purpose of checking the students' ability to participate effectively in group discussion and their ability (Task B). It aims also need to know to what extent lack of vocabulary can affect of students to play an effective part in the group discussion; in order to know if the English Teacher provides students with interactive strategy training. The groups of students will take part in group discussions. Each group will give a social issue with four choices or alternative solutions to discuss for sample of speaking situations). They will then give 10 minutes to discuss and come to a decision. The group discussions will observe and record twice, once before and once after the training. The transcripts of both these sessions will review and compare to examine if vocabulary knowledge can facilitate Sudanese EFL student speaking performance. , specifically in the group discussions. The researcher will observe to identify and examine how vocabulary knowledge can effect on their speaking performance before and after training.

#### **Lesson Plan for focus group:**

For the purposes of further ascertaining the use of the different communicative strategies the researcher selected two groups of undergraduate students at university level consists of 10 people with comparable social status, motivation and other factors , which could be of any influence on language

learning process A target topic in both groups in group (A) will be chosen and Lesson plan for Multiple Intelligences method will be used while the plan in group B was based on the communicative approach. The experiment will consist of 45-minutes (three lessons) following with a test. The test will focus on all aspects of the word knowledge meaning, usage, formation and grammar and pronunciation. The researcher tests the vocabulary that will be already explained and practised. Multiple Intelligences method will use in this kinds of test and it will simple and include these activities such as Synonyms, Definitions, Gap filling , Set of words, Word formation Guessing the meaning from the context .

**The Procedures**

- The group will teach 45 mints for three lessons per a week for one month.
- The group will give a pretest before the researcher started teaching using the previous method to measure students' level.
- The researcher prepares a post test for the final measurement of students' level

**Lesson plan for Communicative Method**

For the second group (B) different activities will use such as: Pictures to facilitate learning of new words, group discussion, debating topics according to students' own interest they will practice the new word that they trained before.

**The Procedures**

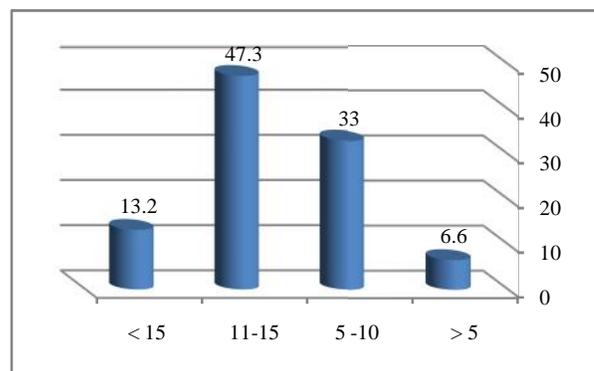
- The group will teach 3 hours for three lessons for 4 week for one month.
- The group will give a pretest before the researcher started teaching using the previous method to measure students' level.
- The researcher prepares a post test for the final measurement of Students' level.

**The Teachers Questionnaire**

The questionnaire is designed for the teachers (TQ). It consists of four parts (A, B, C, D). Part (A) contains the personal information. Part (B) of the (TQ) contains for items that teachers are requested to report, based on personal. In part (C) and (D), the teachers are requested to report about their experiences and teaching methods that they use to assist their students speaking performance. There were also three open- ended items for the strategies they recommend to their students but were not included in either parts (C) or (D). The teacher questionnaire (TQ) designed to tackle the research question number (3) the strategies student use in vocabulary acquisition. On the other hand, teachers' experience was considered as important factor during responding the questionnaire.

**Table 4-2** T-test comparing the results of the two groups.

Means of marks in each question					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
question1	91	.00	17.00	10.9341	4.13065
question2	91	2.00	7.00	4.8242	1.16040
question3	91	.00	5.00	1.6374	1.75446
question4	91	1.00	6.00	3.6374	1.13055
question5	91	.00	6.00	3.8901	1.58780
question6	91	.00	6.00	3.8681	1.43920
question7	91	.00	7.00	3.7363	2.93574
question8	91	.00	6.00	3.7912	1.56003
Total mark	91	11.00	59.00	36.2637	11.35178



Judging by table (4-1) it can readily be observed that the results have remarkably improved, the results of the experimental group have soared up quite significantly. Improvement garnered by members of the controlled group was not expected. However, the students in this group have studied for 45 days, which possibly could have produced that little effect. As shown by the same table, both groups have significantly made successes, better still is the improvement attained by members of the controlled group due to the high scores they realized. These improvements and results attained in the tests account for or verify the original hypotheses one and two: H1. Sudanese undergraduate students are not well aware of communication strategies as effective tools for solving communicative hurdles. Hence, teaching communication strategies will help students improve their communicative abilities. It also verifies H2. As far as the data collection techniques suggest, the experiment group will perform better than the control group as their exposure to the teaching of communication strategies will help them achieve their communicative goals. This comes in line with Faucette (2001) who argues; the CSs requiring L2 production are recommended and desirable strategies to teach. Among them, interactional strategies might be particularly worthwhile.

**CONCLUSION**

It is apparent from the analytical framework carried out above; that the strategies can be introduced and students can be trained to use them adequately to achieve their oral

communicative goals. However, some trainers must also be trained to teach them effectively.

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